

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;  
an elongated shaft attached to said handle; and  
a sharpened tip on said elongated shaft, said sharpened tip including an exposed, tapered, and closed opening configured to trap a suture at a selected point within the opening and to permit the suture to pass lengthwise through the opening.
2. (Canceled)
3. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim [[2]] 1, wherein a least a portion of the opening is dimensioned to wedge and hold a suture in the selected position
4. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 3, wherein said opening comprises a central portion which has said tapered configuration.
5. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim [[2]] 1, wherein said opening comprises a tapered opening.
6. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim [[2]] 1, wherein said opening comprises an elongated opening.

7. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 6, wherein at least a portion of said elongated opening is curved.

8. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip includes an opening; and

a locking mechanism having at least a locked position and an unlocked position, said locking mechanism when in said locked position being configured to trap a suture in said opening.

9. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim [[2]] 1, wherein the suture comprises a length of material, and wherein said opening is configured to allow the suture to pass lengthwise through said opening.

10. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 9, wherein said opening is further configured to allow the suture to be side-loaded into said opening.

11. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip includes an opening into which a suture can be inserted, and wherein said opening is configured to allow the suture to be side loaded into said opening.

12. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip has a hooked configuration.

13. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein:  
said elongated shaft extends along an axial direction; and  
said sharpened tip is angularly bent about a tip axis that is non-parallel with the axial direction and is relative to said shaft in a selected direction.

14. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is configured with at least one spiral loop at the distal end of the shaft.

15. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is bent so the distal tip generally points towards the proximal end of the shaft.

16. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein:  
said elongated shaft extends along an axial direction; and  
said sharpened tip is curved at least partially about the distal end of the shaft and about  
the axial direction.

17. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip extends at an angle and to one side of the distal end.

18. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip extends at least partially forward from the distal end with a concave configuration.

19. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip extends substantially straight and forward from said distal end.

20. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is selectively moveable relative to said shaft.

21. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is selectively detachable from said shaft.

22. (Currently Amended) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;

an elongated shaft attached to said handle at a proximal end of said shaft; and  
a detachable needle at a distal end of said elongated shaft, said needle having a through  
opening into which a suture is attached thereto.

23. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end has a hooked configuration.

24. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end detachable needle is angularly bent relative to said shaft in a selected direction.

25. (Currently Amended and Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end detachable needle is configured with at least one spiral loop at the distal end of the shaft.

26. (Currently Amended and Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end detachable needle is bent so the distal tip generally points towards the proximal end of the shaft.

27. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end detachable needle is curved at least partially about the distal end of the shaft.

28. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end detachable needle extends at an angle and to one side of the distal end.

29. (Currently Amended) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end detachable needle extends at least partially forward from the distal end with a concave configuration.

30. (Currently Amended and Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said ~~distal end~~ detachable needle extends substantially straight and forward from said distal end.

31. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said needle and suture are detachably affixed to said suturing device by threading the suture through a portion of said suturing device.

32. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said needle and suture are detachably affixed to said suturing device by threading the suture through at least the distal end and the shaft of said suturing device.

33. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said needle and suture are side-loaded into said suturing device.

34. (Withdrawn) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;  
an elongated shaft attached to said handle at a proximal end of said shaft;  
a sharpened tip at a distal end of said elongated shaft; and  
a tissue support device disposed adjacent said sharpened tip, configured to move relative to said sharpened tip to facilitate penetration of said sharpened tip through a tissue.

35. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 34, wherein suture is connected with said sharpened tip and moves with the sharpened tip as the sharpened tip penetrates through the tissue.

36. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 34, wherein a suture is connected with said tissue support device, and is located to be engaged by said sharpened tip as said sharpened tip is withdrawn from the tissue.

37-50. (Cancelled)

51. (Withdrawn) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;  
an elongated shaft attached to said handle;  
a sharpened tip on said elongated shaft,  
said sharpened tip being configured to engage a suture; and  
a locking mechanism having at least a locked position and an unlocked position, said locking mechanism when in said locked position being configured to hold the suture in a selected position.

52. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 51, wherein said locking mechanism has at least one partially closed position for capturing the suture and for controlled adjustment of the suture relative to the sharpened tip.

53. (Withdrawn) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;  
an elongated shaft attached to said handle;  
a sharpened tip on said elongated shaft,  
said sharpened tip having an opening configured to allow the suture to be side-loaded onto said device.

54. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 53, wherein said opening comprises a tapered opening.

55. (Currently Amended) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;  
an elongated shaft attached to said handle;  
a sharpened tip on said elongated shaft,  
said sharpened tip having a piercing portion configured to pierce tissue during a suturing procedure and having an exposed, tapered, and closed opening; and  
a suture coupled with said sharpened tip, said suture having a suture portion extending outward from said sharpened tip to permit said suture to be grasped and manipulated relative to said sharpened tip, said suture portion disposed to be carried by the sharpened tip through tissue which has been pierced by said piercing portion;  
wherein the opening is configured to permit the suture to pass lengthwise through the opening.

56. (Canceled)